

Consider Diligently

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[0 : 00] Proverbs chapter number 23. I expect that there'll be about between 15 and 20 more sermons for the book of Proverbs. And then we're going to the book of Lamentations. And today we're going to look at the first 12 verses here in Proverbs 23.

And they kind of hold a unit or a theme that we're looking at, which has to do with our motives in life. And that's quite important to all of us.

And every action that we have is influenced by either a proper motive or an improper motive. Sometimes it's hard to know, right, the difference between the two of those.

But they're very important because our lives are to be lived bringing glory to God, which means that we're not just robots, that just doing something is sufficient.

We're supposed to do things in a way that would bring honor and glory to God. And so this passage challenges us to consider our motives. And I'm going to have to look at the order of service a little bit.

[0 : 58] I realize I left the guys on the guitar and the bass standing up here the entire time. And Stephen is in California, him and Stephanie. I'm just so grateful that they were able to go out there and be with Mitch and Jackie.

And so be praying for them as they go out to minister to them. And then on Sunday, I meant to do it tonight before we split into two groups. But this coming Sunday, we'll take a vote to give some money to Mitch and Jackie as they lost their child.

Now it's been about two weeks, I believe. And if you just continue to pray for them and make sure you pray for Stephen and Stephanie as well as they travel back this week.

Proverbs chapter number 23, verses... I'm going to start with verses 1 through 3. And then we will just walk our way through the passage here. Proverbs 23, verses 1 through 3.

When thou sittest to eat with a ruler... That's a person, not a measuring stick, okay? When thou sittest to eat with a ruler, consider diligently... And that's what I'm going to challenge you in tonight.

[2 : 03] These two words is consider diligently what is before thee. And put a knife to thy throat, if thou be a man given the appetite. Be not desirous of his dainties, for they are deceitful meat.

So much here. An invitation to sit with the powerful. Daniel had it in Daniel chapter number 1. We know that story. They were put there to sit with a group of powerful people there in Babylon.

And they could have very easily been persuaded by the influence that is there. And you have probably been in that position as well. That you've sat with people that had power or influence in some area.

And you knew. Some of you could probably raise your hand in here. Where you've been at a lunch before or had a meeting. Where you knew that this meeting was going to make a difference about your future.

You desired to have their approval. And it's something that when you're in that position that you can really struggle with when it comes to motive. What is the purpose of being here?

[3 : 09] So the thing that we're told is that when we're at a table where there's people of greater influence. Who have influence in our lives. We need to consider diligently what is before us.

And that doesn't just mean what's on the table. You know, just looking at it. Or looking at why they have a big fork and a little fork. Or any of that silliness that goes on. But consider diligently what is before us in regards to our own appetite.

Narrowly is focusing on food here. But more than that, it can be interpreted more broadly about appetite. What's necessary for a person who cannot control their appetite here.

It says to put a knife to your throat. So that you do not just give yourself fully to indulging in all that you want. And the picture isn't just about eating too much.

It's about just giving yourself completely to the desire and your lust appetite. Matthew 5, 29-30 tells us how strong our fight should be against the lust of our flesh, right?

[4 : 11] So much that we should be, to the extent we're willing to pluck an eye out or cut off an arm. Which is not telling us to do either one of those. But it's saying, to what standards should you be willing to not fulfill your lust?

It's very extreme. So we're told that when something's in front of you, you need to control your desire. Because if your motives drive you to just indulge in taking everything, it's going to lead you to sin.

It made me think of a time, this had been about 10 years ago, and there was nobody in this room. Nobody that most of you would even know. But somebody invited me to an Indian buffet. If you've ever been with an Indian buffet before, you would know that I could eat my weight in Indian food.

And so we went to an Indian buffet, and I was just having a great time. And I was just eating and eating. And then when I got so full, once I got full, the conversation changed.

And the person says, I have something against you. I have something I want to talk to you about. And I think, I sure wish you would have told me that like three plates ago. Because I'm completely unprepared at this point to say or do anything.

[5 : 17] You know, I couldn't think straight. And so that lack of moderation in one area leads to an indulgence in other areas. So it says when you sit down with some people, and you need to be careful that you don't just give yourself completely over to desires for that food.

Because in doing that, you're going to give yourself completely over to other selfish desires that you may have in that conversation. And that's a dangerous place to be. You should be praying about it.

You should walk into that meeting and say, God, I want to handle myself in a wise way. I don't want to have selfish motivations in life. I want to be led by you. And so how do we consider what is before us in regards to our motivation?

Diligently consider what's set before you. How do we decide? How do you know if you're driven with a zeal for good works or driven by an ungodly ambition?

How do you know which is going on? Parable of the talents, Matthew chapter number 25. Eight different talents are given out, right? One received five, one received two, and one received one.

[6 : 18] Two of the men made an investment. Another one didn't make the investment, didn't do anything with it. We should live our lives, regardless of occupation, regardless of the stress level that I know many of you have, realizing Matthew 11, 28 through 30.

Come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden. I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart. You shall find rest upon your souls, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

The labor that pleases God is a labor that embraces that the yoke is easy and the burden of obedience is light. I'm not trying to take away from the fact that many of you in here have very stressful jobs, and the work that you do is hard.

It's certainly hard. The job that your employer gives you is hard. I mean, it's physically demanding, it's emotionally and mentally demanding. That is true. But what God has given you to do, the burden is light.

The yoke that He has given you. For the love of God that we keep His commandments, commandments are not grievous. And so, you have this pressure when you're sitting down and you should consider your motives when meeting with people.

[7 : 29] You're going to best serve God when you know that He does not need your service. When you can relax and trust the Lord and say, God, I do not have to have this for my identity.

I don't have to have these people to agree with me or to like me or to make the sale or whatever for me to have value in your eyes.

Because if you're trying to always prove something to this world, prove something to yourself, then you're always going to live with this burden upon you. That's not what God has called us to do.

It's a wonderful place to be. I'd like to share a story I shared with Life Group today. Something to rejoice in with my brother. My brother had been in jail for 10 days. And then afterwards, he went to a rehab.

And then while he was in the rehab, some things happened and he was going to get kicked out of. And it was a really nice place. And it was the place that exactly where my family had been praying that he would be.

[8 : 26] In a Christian rehab, making right decisions. He'd even called some pastors that he knew to talk with him on the phone. And it just felt like this is the place geographically that we would want him to be.

And then he has to leave. And his response was, Mom, I'm just going to trust God. God, wherever he places me, I'm able to get my life right and do right and obedient to him.

So geographically, he moved where we'd want him to be. But in his heart, what a wonderful place to be, right? Where you're not being the trickster anymore. Where you're not feeling like you have all the responsibility.

Where you can just trust God. And so the motivation is to say, I'm going to put in all the work I can. I'm going to do my very best at this. But regardless of the outcome, I do not lose value before a God who loves me.

And so we serve God best when we know that he has no need of our service. And so then the next two verses. Labor not to be rich. Cease from thine own wisdom. Wilt thou set thine eye upon that which is not?

[9 : 31] For riches certainly make themselves wings. They fly away as an eagle toward heaven. And so this warns us to beware of the idol of wealth. You know the song, I Can't Sing It.

You know that. Labor not for wealth or fame. There's a crown and you can win it if you will go in Jesus' name. So labor not for wealth or fame. Or wealth or fame.

Or protection by gathering up the resources of this earth. That's really what motivates so much. When you think about gathering up riches for yourself other than just in a way that would be pleasing to the Lord.

What is the great draw to wealth? It would be the fame that would be available to it. The pleasure that would be available for it. Or the protection that we believe that it provides. And then it says here that you know that in trying to keep it would be like trying to catch an eagle that would be flying upward.

I've never done it. I don't plan to do that. All right? They are incredible creatures. The South African. I don't know if you're in the teens in here. Emily obviously lived there. We went to see the birds and to see them do a bird show.

[10 : 41] And the birds are incredibly strong. You're right? In their eyesight. And the idea that you're going to keep an eagle down when it wants to go up is the picture that we're given here of being able to keep our wealth and our riches if they're just only going to be for our own protection, our own pleasure, our own safety.

And so it tells us not to labor not for that. Which leads me to the question, and maybe you as well, how do you balance laboring to be rich versus working to pay the bills?

Because one of them is something we're told to do, right? And then one of them we're told not to do. But if you were to look in a window at somebody that was working, and when I went over to Paul's company and I looked in and saw me as a computer, when I say, Paul is laboring to be rich or Paul's working to pay the bills from the outside, I would have no idea which one he's doing, right?

It would have to do with the motive of the heart. And so it tells us in this verse here how to know if you're doing one of them. And it says, labor not to be rich, cease from thine own wisdom.

Laboring to be rich is a person who would believe in their own wisdom. And that person who has said, set not thine eyes upon this, once again going to the motive of what you are doing.

[11 : 54] Any of you ever went to the doctor and when you went up to the front counter they said, can you have your insurance card? And you said, I'm self-insured, right? Any of you ever said that?

It means one or two things, right? For me it meant I have no insurance, all right? And the other one it meant you are so wealthy that you are self-insured. That's very impressive. You do not even need insurance.

You're self-insured. And so which one of these would you, if you were the one that was so wealthy you'd be self-insured, you would believe that the Bible would speak to you when it speaks about the rich?

1 Timothy 6, 17 and 18, it speaks about those that are rich in this world. I won't take long on this point, but I think I can make the case that is every one of us in here.

That we live in a world with more expendable wealth, more expendable time, than just about any group of people did in history, than most people do in this world. Our students who come for the training center, I mean they're able to work part-time jobs and eat and drive cars and live here.

[12 : 58] That isn't happening in a lot of parts of the world. Any of you all on the trip to Burkina Faso and we saw people who worked six days a week and just if they ever were to stop at any point, then it would require other people around them to make up the difference.

There was no margin for error in that type of life. That's the life so many people live. And so I won't belabor the point, but I think every one of us know that when the Bible talks about the rich of this world, that's something that every one of us could fall into, regardless of where you think your income falls on the list.

It's not just for the 1%. This would be for all of us in here. It says 1 Timothy 6, 17 and 18, So people that try to labor to be rich are people that would trust in their own riches, but those are uncertain, but they should trust in a living God who gives us richly all things to enjoy.

And so the problem is not in the riches that are given to us to enjoy, but it's in the trusting of them that causes people to labor in vain, that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate.

And so here we have in these two verses three different commands to those of us that are rich in this world. One is be not high-minded. Always be grateful. You see people and they don't have as much as you?

[14 : 24] You should be grateful and say that if you even earn what you did because of your work ethic or you earn what you did because of your education or because you're mentally astute, say, that's a gift from God.

The mental capacity you have, that's a gift from God. The work ethic you have, that was a gift from God that was probably instilled to you by your parents or somebody in your life.

And so you don't look down upon them and say, I'm better and a high-minded, but you ought to be humbled and say, I thank you, God, for this. And then you trust not in those riches. There's not enough of them that when they decide to fly away like an eagle, you can't stop them.

And then it tells us that if you are going to be rich, you should be rich in good works, be ready to be generous, looking for God to give through you into other opportunities in this world.

And so there's no problem with money flowing through your hands. The problem is wanting to be rich, wanting to have for only your own pleasure. That's why the Bible speaks of it in the terms of will-be as a motivation.

[15 : 24] 1 Timothy 6, 9, For they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and to many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. A wrong motive for collecting the riches of this world can lead you to all kinds of hurt.

And it's easy to look at others and believe that this is not an issue that we face, but it can be for every one of us. And so the New Testament gives a relentless push towards what some would call an intentional simplicity.

That the Bible doesn't just give it in one passage, but it's all throughout the New Testament. It gives us biblical wisdom on how to safeguard our heart and how to consider diligently our motivations in life.

One being, the pleasures of this world can choke out our joy, even though they have been marketed as an answer to all of our problems. Luke 8, 14, And they that which fell among thorns are they which, when they heard, go forth and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection.

We're told that riches and pleasures of this world would sound all wonderful, wonderful that those same things can be used in your life to choke out the joy that was there.

[16 : 41] Some of you may have seen this with your kids. Birthday or Christmas or something, you had something and I won't mention, I don't want, oh, none of my kids are here. I say whatever I want tonight, all right? I got this one gift and I just really knew it was going to be the gift for the family that was just going to bring us together, and it was just going to bring us all so much joy.

And did it do that? No, it didn't. It choked out the pleasure of the moment. It robbed us from joy, because then it became something that we were fighting over, all right?

And I won't mention what it is, but every one of you have something like that. And so the world, so we believe that these things are going to only add to our pleasure and joy in life, but that is, or only add to our joy, that these pleasures only add to our joy, but that is not often the case.

And then the opposite of covetousness is knowing your identity is not a reflection of the things that you have. Luke 12, 15. And he said unto them, Take heed and beware of covetousness, for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things in which he possesses.

So it says the opposite of covetousness is to not believe that what you own is what identifies you. I don't know what it is in your life or what stage in life that becomes.

[17 : 56] Probably the strongest that I experienced it as a teenager. You could drive just about anything in West Kentucky. There was no laws about, what's the, emissions?

There's no emissions, all right? You could drive a tractor, you could drive four-wheeler, you could drive, you could just drive anything you want on the road. And so there was nothing, but it always was a status symbol.

My first car, I bought for \$100 from a guy named Waldo, and I bought it because he had this, he had this police siren on the top of it, and I thought I could get more than \$100 out of it.

And, but he took it off when he sold it to me, and then he took the battery off, and it had plywood on the floors, a 1983 Plymouth Reliant, and reliable was not what it was, all right?

And so this was my first car, and so, but if I went somewhere, I did not park up front, all right? I parked down the road, I parked and I hid that thing, because I did not want to be standing beside that car, because as a teenager, you'd be tempted to be associated with it.

[18 : 57] You would hope we would grow out of that, but do we? I mean, how often do we make purchases simply as a status symbol, just as something to tell the world, or maybe even ourselves, that we have arrived, and that's not a proper motivation for enjoying what God has given us, because we don't need those things for that to happen.

Bible tells us not to covet. Covet just means simply loving something too much, loving it the way you shouldn't love it. This could be your husband, your health, your life, in such a way that it starts to undermine your love for God.

It seems that in the teenage years, in the early teenage years, is when you begin to consider that all the things that I have that used to be so great, and fun, and wonderful. That place set in the back of my yard, that's just hours of fun.

Somewhere about middle school, everything that you currently have is not cool anymore. It's not fun anymore. And so you begin to start looking outside of what you currently have, and then you start wanting to look at your parents' phones so you can look on Amazon, or you're wanting to get the catalog at Christmas so you can circle them.

But there's a certain point at your age where you think, I need something more than what I currently have. And then covetousness says, I'm going to go outside of what God would have for me, and I'm going to begin to realize that there is some attraction to the things that God doesn't want for me to have, and I would covet those and go after them here.

[20 : 24] And you ought to recognize, you ought to be aware of this covetousness. Beware desiring something that God would not have for you to have. Then moving on here, in Matthew 6, 19, Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal.

Laying up treasures for ourselves goes against the purpose of treasures. It shows the same heart as those who will try to steal it. So there's a way in which we would store up treasures that has the same motivation as the people who would come in and steal those treasures, which is, this is just for me.

This is just for my pleasure. This isn't for the resource that God had given me, which may be to care for your family, which may be to provide, you know, for other people in the care, but it's to say, just a selfish pleasure.

That's the motive that you would see in somebody that's stealing, right? They would say, you have it, and I want it for myself. Occasionally, you have the Robin Hood, the somebody who steals from the rich and gives to the poor, but that's not who the Bible is speaking about in this.

We're talking about a person who would want to steal for their own personal pleasure. The Bible would tell us that our treasures upon earth, that they're just going to be kept for that same purpose. You might as well allow them to be stolen, because they're going to be eaten up.

[21 : 45] Either you're going to try to keep them so tightly just for your own self, and either the moth is going to get them, or they're going to rust, or somebody's going to steal them. But if you try to just keep it for yourself, it will not last.

And in Luke 12, 33, Sell that you have and give alms, provide yourself bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that felleth not, where no thief approaches, neither moth corrupteth.

Here we are told to let our treasures serve their God-given purpose and affect eternity, is that we can be a resource, a channel that God could give money through to make an eternal difference.

And so now it's getting back to our motives. Seek first the kingdom of God. Where are our ambitions? Where are they placed? Where are our motives? The Bible provides a constant reminder to us how little value earthly things have in light of eternity.

Luke 12, 20, But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee, when those shall those things be which thou hast provided. There's going to come a time when all those things that we fight to hold on to would just disappear.

[22 : 54] And on the other side of eternity, if we don't invest them wisely, we'll have no eternal difference. And even more so, Jesus tells us that riches can hinder a person obtaining eternal life.

And how is that? Is it that you're just too wealthy? You get to heaven, they're like, no, you're too wealthy, you can't give me in. No, that's not what it is. It says in Luke 18, 23, it says, And when he heard this, he was very sorrowful, for he was very rich.

And when Jesus saw that he was very sorrowful, he said, How hardly shall they have riches enter into the kingdom of God? For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye than for a rich man to enter to the kingdom of God.

I'm going to say this last point and pray, and then we'll sing with them, if they will let us, before we leave here tonight, then you get near through half the notes here. But I want you to consider this. Understanding that riches can be a hindrance to eternal life and understanding that all of us have already agreed in here that the sins of riches can be something that we can fall into.

Because of being American and where we're at right now, it's available to every one of us, not just to the 1%, but to every one of us in this room, we could fall into some of these same kind of snares and same kind of traps.

[24 : 06] The ruler in this story was so attached to his wealth that the idea of obtaining eternal life, which he had so nobly asked at the beginning of the conversation with the Lord, but now because of his wealth, he is kept from making that decision.

I would challenge you that when we are in discipleship with our kids concerning wealth, we understand how vitally important that it is to help them separate who they are from what they have.

This is a scary thought. We're saying that we live in a time with an abundance of riches, and then the Bible tells us that riches can hurt the cause of Christ.

They can hurt people recognizing their need of a Savior. And so I tell us, let's be careful. Let's be careful about this. Some years ago, I wrote some articles for a local newspaper online.

I think like 10 people read it. I'm serious. Like everybody had an online newspaper back in early 2005. Everybody wanted like Alpharetta News or something. And what I wrote about was the dangers of raising your kids in Alpharetta.

[25 : 13] And what it had to do was the entitlement that our kids could learn because it seems like if the park gets full, we build another park. If the water fountain has a line, we give them another water fountain.

And so I just want to give you a challenge tonight that riches can be used to make an eternal difference in this world. And we've heard and we've celebrated the day. We partnered with Medical Missions Outreach, and that is one way in which that our money was used for the cause of Christ.

And you personally, in your own ministries in life, you buy meals for people and you do things, and you've seen the value that money can use to make a difference. And so we know that it in itself is not evil, but the Bible tells us that if we don't disciple and educate our kids properly, they could grow up and it could be harder for them to get saved than it would be for a camel to go through the eye of a needle.

So I challenge you, when you talk to the kids, and when you're talking to other people in life, not just kids and fellow co-workers, that we don't just teach them the Dave Ramsey envelope system, which so many people love, which would be very dangerous for me and Stephanie to have envelopes of cash around, all right?

We lose everything, all right? You could tell Dave Ramsey I said that. It's not a good plan for our family, all right? Is that not just figure out how to handle your finances, but to make sure that your heart doesn't get knit to them.

[26 : 36] And so I would challenge you personally and those that you disciple that it can be a real hindrance to knowing God the way that we should. All right, let's pray together.

And then if you girls would make your way back up here, and we need the two guitar players as well, all right? And we will stand and sing the song as we leave the night. Heavenly Father, Lord, I thank you for the Proverbs and practical instruction.

Father, you know many of us in here did not have a earthly father who would teach us these truths, but we are so grateful that we have in Proverbs wisdom from our Heavenly Father how our lives should be lived.

In Jesus' name I pray.